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TITLE: System for Storing and Supplying Wireless Contacts Information

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SYSTEM FOR STORING AND SUPPLYING WIRELESS CONTACTS INFORMATION

Cross-Reference to Related Application

5 This application claims the priority benefit of U.S. provisional patent application serial no. 60/169,605, filed December 8, 1999, by the same inventors and having the same title.

Background Of The Invention

10 1. Field of the Invention.

 The present invention relates to directories of communications contact numbers. More particularly, the present invention relates to directories of wireless communications contact numbers. Specifically, the present invention is a storage and transmission system to supply wireless communication contact numbers
15 upon request.

2. Description of the Prior Art.

 Conventional landline telecommunications systems have been in existence for many years. Land-line telecommunications involve the physical coupling
20 through a conductive medium such as a copper wire or optical fiber, between locations having transceiving equipment, such as telephones. Until fairly recently, most non-military communications have occurred via landlines. More recently, radio-frequency-based communications have become commercially viable for the mass market. This form of analog and digital communication requires no physical
25 conduction medium and so is termed "wireless." Wireless communications free the user from the obligation of remaining proximate to the base equipment associated with landline communications. Instead, signal transmission occurs via satellites, wireless booster towers, and miniaturized transceivers that form part of the mobile wireless communication equipment.

30 In order for communications to occur between two or more locations having telecommunications equipment, it has been necessary for at least one of

those locations to know the contact information (telephone number, electronic mail ("email") address, etc.) for the other location or locations to be contacted. This need gave rise to the development of databases or directories of contact information for specific telecommunications-system-equipped locations. One
5 obvious example of such a database or directory is the telephone book, which provides a listing of contact telephone numbers for individuals and businesses within a specified region. Additionally, local and national directory assistance providers generate and supply contact information upon telephonic request. In operation, communicators of directory assistance service providers retrieve from a
10 series of database choices the information of interest and convey it to the interested party. Unfortunately, the landline-based directories are updated only occasional and can at times be significantly out-of-date. This can be a significant deficiency as interest in rapid acquisition of accurate information increases.

Some estimates indicate that as many as ten billion calls are made for
15 directory assistance for telephone numbers per annum throughout the world, indicating the importance of such contact information. Further, as use of the Internet expands, alternative databases of telephone numbers, facsimile numbers, email addresses, website addresses, and the like are made accessible by way of computer devices, such as personal computers. Necessarily, given the
20 scope of interest in obtaining such contact information telephonically and by computer, the value of directory assistance providers has increased.

Unfortunately, the directories that are presently available are limited to the contact information for landline-based systems. That is, there exists no generally available directory of contact information for wireless systems. The lack of such a
25 directory or set of directories, may be blamed in part on the fact that only for wireless systems is the receiving party charged by the service provider for incoming contacts. Owners of wireless communications systems therefore tend to reserve publication of contact information in order to minimize unsolicited contacts and thereby control wireless system use costs. On the other hand, the
30 service providers for landline-based systems obtain revenue by charging only the party that initiates a communication. There appears to be a possibility that

owners of wireless systems will be relieved of the burden of double charging for incoming and outgoing communications. If and when that occurs, there will likely be an increase in wireless communications and an increased need for one or more contact information directories for wireless systems.

Therefore, what is needed is a system for gathering, storing, and making available contact information for wireless communication devices. What is also needed is such a system that can be readily accessed by any sort of entity interested in obtaining such information, including communications interface facilitators, individuals, etc. Further, what is needed such a system that is updatable with greater frequency than existing contact information directories. Preferably, such a system is designed to be used in a manner similar to that associated with conventional landline-based directories.

Summary Of The Invention

It is an object of the present invention to provide a system for gathering, storing, and making available contact information for wireless communication devices. It is also an object of the present invention to make such a system readily accessible by any sort of entity interested in obtaining such information, including, but not limited to, communications interface facilitators as well as individuals. Further, it is an object of the present invention to provide a wireless contact information directory that includes contact information having a high degree of accuracy. Yet further, it is an object of the present invention to provide such a wireless directory system that performs in a manner similar to that experienced in the use of a conventional landline-based directory.

These and other objects are achieved in the present invention through the formation of a centralized database of contact information for wireless devices including, but not limited to, pagers, cellular phones, wireless portable computing devices such as laptops and personal digital assistants, and the like. Presently, a plurality of wireless communications service providers have separate and isolated databases of subscriber information including subscriber contact information (e.g., the pager or cellular phone number). Under existing telecommunications laws,

that information must be shared with other telecommunication service providers. The present invention involves a gathering of that disparate information by polling at selectable frequencies the data available from such providers. The present invention includes means for retrieving such information, manipulating it for ease of accessibility by other disparate database search systems, and storing it at either a centralized location or regional terminals for ease of retrieval. The invention further includes means for interfacing with directory assistance service providers, Internet directory assistance service providers, and even individual contact information seekers so as to facilitate the exchange of such information using software compatible with the operating platforms of such varied wireless contact information requesters.

The development of a centralized storage system of contact information for wireless devices will enhance the use of such devices. Further, the retrieval, storage, and transmission system of the present invention appears to be usable in the manner of existing landline directory assistant systems but with much greater uniformity and substantially real-time data. These and other advantages of the present invention will become apparent upon review of the following description, the accompanying drawings, and the appended claims.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a simplified diagrammatic flowchart representation of the primary components of the wireless directory assistance system of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a representation of a wireless device and the screen display for entry into the contact information system of the present invention.

FIGS. 3-6 are screen displays illustrating the steps and resultant information associated with conducting a contact information query.

FIGS. 7-20 are screen displays illustrating the steps for entry of contact information associated with the system of the present invention.

Description Of The Invention

A wireless directory system 10 of the present invention is shown in FIG. 1.

Each of the components to be described herein is generally commercially available. The system **10** involves the coupling of those components and associated software to enable interaction resulting in an accessible wireless contact information directory. A primary component of the system **10** is a central network station **20**. The network station **20** is a computing device having mass storage capability and means for carrying out software-based instructions. The network station **20** is preferably a minicomputer or a mainframe computer but is not limited thereto. The network station **20** is programmable to receive and store contact information including, but not limited to, the access numbers of any of a plurality of wireless transceivers **30** and contact-identifying information associated with those numbers, e.g., a person's name.

The contact information associated with the transceivers **30** is preferably obtained by the station **20** through service provider database stations or local exchange carriers represented as stations **100**, **101**, ... **N** in FIG. 1. It is a matter of legislative obligation that such wireless service providers provide to any other telecommunications service provider the contact information of its subscribers. Therefore, in order to gain access to that information, the station **20** also includes telecommunications routing and switching mechanism so as to operate as a telecommunications station. The system **10** includes a router/Communicator Identification Code (CIC) switch station **40** that enables the central station **20** to interface with the service provider stations **100**, **101**, ..., **N**.

The contact information received by the central station **20** from the service provider stations **100**, **101**, ..., **N** is formatted as necessary to enable directory assistance service providers represented by site **50** to interface with the station **20** to query it for contact information, possibly in exchange for a fee. The manipulation of that information results in a unique database of wireless telecommunications device users heretofore not available. Additionally, the station **20** is further programmed to communicate with Internet-based directory assistance service providers **60** as well as individuals **70** interested in obtaining such contact information. In effect, the station **20** is a routing, switching, data storage, and interface system. All communications with the various stations to

which the central station **20** is coupled may occur through digital, analog, T1, T3, CAT5, frame-based data transport protocols, asynchronous mode transport protocols, among others. The central station **20** preferably polls the service provider stations **100, 101, ..., N** one or more times per day and is preferably
5 always accessible by contact sites **50, 60, or 70** worldwide so as to provide essentially real-time contact information.

The components of the system **10** described herein operate in conjunction such that contact information may be transmitted, stored, or retrieved, or any combination thereof. Means such as software is employed to establish the
10 interrelationships among the network station **20**, transceivers **30**, contact sites and providers. Those skilled in the art of software development will readily ascertain the details of programming the exchange of information based upon the following exemplar representation of the operation of the system **10** for an individual wireless device user. First, as illustrated in FIG. 2, contact information
15 software is preferably loaded onto a wireless device. It is represented in FIG. 2 as a cellular phone; however, it may be any sort of cellular, wireless, mobile, or network-capable telephone or signal exchange device. Once loaded and the user has scrolled through other programs available on the device, the exchange program of the present invention is initiated by accessing the program when it
20 flashes onto the device's display. For example, in FIG. 2, the applicable screen display shows "WDN."

As illustrated in FIG. 3, the first screen display provided upon accessing the program of the present invention permits the user to access contact information such as by wireless number, landline number, fax number, email
25 address, shipping address, vacation number, temporary number, emergency number, personal directory number, and pager number. Each choice is category specific, thereby allowing the user to delimit the particular database to be searched to access contact information of interest. Upon selection of a particular search category, a voice recognition program is activated and a second screen
30 display is presented, as shown in FIG. 4. The display of FIG. 4 prompts the user to speak certain attributes of the individual or entity for which contact information

is to be accessed. For example, those attributes may be country, state or province, city, name of contact, and occupation. Of course, other attributes may be employed in the contact system. In the event the spoken attribute information fails to result in a reasonable "hit" of the contact information database accessed
5 through the station **20**, the user may be directed to a call center for a human interface to assist in the search, much like existing landline phone information services.

The system is further programmed to provide, upon finding a contact information set corresponding to the input attributes, the contact information, as
10 shown by example in FIGS. 5 and 6. The system also optionally provides for generation of an audio display of the contact information. It is to be understood that voice activation and feedback is provided using conventional and commercially available voice recognition and output systems that may be linked with the central station **20**, providers, and any other sources of contact
15 information. The user further has the option to scroll through similar or related listings, to contact the individual or entity listed, to save the information to a local or remote database, to leave a message that is textual or audio, or to otherwise manipulate the information. The user as desired may arrange the information for display.

20 The software of the present invention is further programmed to enable individual users to access the database or groups of databases in order to enter contact information data. In particular, and with reference to FIGS. 7-20, the software creates a series of interactive screen displays that a user employs to add contact information to the user's local database housed in the wireless
25 device, a central or combination database regulated by the station **20**, or both. The user may select from an array of listing choices that may be modified as desired. The software is configured to permit the user to enter the information by touching a keypad of the wireless device, through voice input, or both. As illustrated in FIG. 7, the user gains access to contact information addition or
30 modification by entering the correct password. As illustrated in FIGS. 8 and 9, the contact name is entered. As illustrated in FIGS. 10-13, the appropriate contact

address information is then entered. Next, as illustrated in FIG. 14, the occupation (or other desired attribute) of the contact may optionally be entered. As shown in FIG. 15, the wireless alphanumerics for the contact for the party of interest is entered into the system **10**. Related information that may or may not be of interest, such as landline number, emergency number, email address, and a temporary number, as shown in FIGS. 16-19, may be entered, or one or more may be skipped.

Once the user enters the data into the various category specific fields, he or she instructs the system to post the information to the station **20** so that all system users or subscribers may access it. In doing so, the user automatically updates the entire database of contact information to include the new posting. In this way, any user or provider has the capability to update the wireless directory accessible by all in a much more rapid fashion than something such as the conventional landline directories do.

While the invention has been described with reference to a particular example embodiment, it is intended to cover all modifications and equivalents as established by the following claims.